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Soviet Censorship of Liberal Intellectuals

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SOVIET CENSORSHIP OF LIBERAL INTELLECTUALS

Except for a brief interval this summer, public expression by Soviet intellectuals since the spring of 1965 has grown more pallid as the permissible range of nonconformity has narrowed. The Sinyavsky-Daniel trial in the winter of 1966 underlined the dangers to writers of portraying Soviet life in a "negative" light.

Official insistence that this year of the Great Fiftieth Anniversary must be celebrated in an atmosphere of "unity" may preclude further show trials, but it greatly increased the more subtle pressures for conformity. In June and early July, however, liberal intellectuals, possibly encouraged by personnel shifts in the Kremlin hierarchy, renewed public discussion of controversial ideas not heard since 1965.

The discussion for the most part was cautious, but its appearance lightened somewhat the leaden atmosphere that has prevailed during the anniversary year. In various forms, the intellectuals asserted their right to describe the life around them, including its blemishes, as they see it.

In contrast to earlier periods of intellectual restiveness when the participants were drawn from the fine arts, this time the burden of the liberal argument was carried by social scientists and journalists. Their public argument ceased abruptly in early July, however, after a sharp reaction to the liberals' claims was published in the Moscow press.

The Political Climate

Public expression of controversial ideas in the Soviet Union usually depends on two persons being willing to take a risk at a given time: a writer with something to say and an editor willing to print what he says. Over the years, the liberal intellectuals who have repeatedly risked their careers by publishing unorthodox ideas have become sensitive observers of the Soviet political climate. Their articles have usually appeared when there

were signs of fluidity in the Kremlin leadership. Khrushchev himself, on occasion, unleashed intellectual unrest for his own political purposes as, for example, when he authorized the publication in 1962 of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel of life in a Stalinist prison camp, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, in an effort to build up pressures against his conservative opponents.

During the six-month shakedown of the new leadership team following Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964, the intellectuals reacted with an extraordinary outburst of nonconformity. As the new team found its bearings, however, censorship controls were reasserted and the public intellectual life of the Soviet Union became steadily more pallid. A respected Western literary critic commented earlier this year that what is now allowed to appear in print is so dull and insignificant as to be comparable only to the literature of the Stalin years.

This summer the liberal intellectuals began once again to take risks, apparently in the belief that there were encouraging signs in a series of shifts in the party hierarchy. In April, for example, the head of TASS, the official press agency, who was a member of the cultural hard-line "Komsomol group" associated with politburo member Aleksandr Shelepin, was "transferred to other work." In mid-May, a second member of the group, Vladimir Semichastny, was abruptly replaced as head of the Committee of State Security (KGB) by candidate member of the politburo Yuri Andropov. Semichastny's removal was widely regarded by liberal intellectuals as a favorable development. Andropov's attitude toward their problems is less well known, but his public speeches have at least been more temperately phrased. Several Soviet journalists have described him as "educated, intelligent, and sympathetic."

There was no immediate public reaction to these personnel shifts, but at the otherwise dull Fourth USSR Writers Congress in late May, novelist Solzhenitsyn circulated a protest against censorship, and particularly against the KGB's confiscation of his unpublished manuscripts in 1965. Although the protest was never mentioned in the Soviet press, the case aroused tremendous sympathy among congress participants and many signed petitions supporting Solzhenitsyn.

According to Western press reports, Solzhenitsyn's manuscripts were returned to him after the congress closed, and he was given guarded assurances that at least some of his work would be published after the November celebrations.

Following Semichastny's downgrading, the Moscow rumor mill began to list the names of others who might be expected to go. Among them was Sergey Pavlov, the severely orthodox head of the party's youth organization, the Komsomol. Possibly because of

this uncertainty about Pavlov's tenure, the editors of the Komsomol newspaper were emboldened to publish a series of controversial articles expressing views widely at variance with Pavlov's own speeches.

The Social Scientists Speak Out

In early June, Komsomolskaya Pravda, the youth organization's paper, carried an article by A. M. Rumyantsev, a former chief editor of Pravda and now a vice president of the Academy of Sciences, in which he made a strong plea for further development of the social sciences. The social sciences are suspect among Soviet conservatives as a threat to official doctrine and as potential vehicles for criticizing party policies. The study of political science has been banned in the Soviet Union since the 1930s. Sociology, which fell under the same ban, has been making a slow comeback but is still not offered as a major field of study in any university. The need to professionalize the field was widely discussed in the later Khrushchev years, but the discussions petered out early in 1966.

In his article, Rumyantsev attributed the backwardness of Soviet social sciences to the intellectual stagnation of the "not too distant past." Rumyantsev was clearly reviving the contentious Stalin issue, and using it as it had been used during the Khrushchev years--the citation of "mistakes" from the "past" as an argument for current change.

Also in early June, Komsomolskaya Pravda carried an article on sociology complaining that Soviet sociologists are not addressing themselves to "real social problems." The article made an extraordinary bid for an increase in the influence of intellectuals on policy making, claiming they must be allowed to play a bigger role in "changing society's very structure." It demanded that sociological research be used to improve society rather than merely as a device of the regime to control it.

In mid-June an article in Komsomolskaya Pravda by a Komsomol official responsible for propaganda produced further surprises, as much because of the author's position as for what he said. In discussing ideological work, he raised the problem of the gulf between theory and reality in Soviet life. He quoted a member of the Komsomol who complained that he had studied Marx and Lenin faithfully and, having compared their writings with his experience at work, had reached the conclusion that something was wrong. "What then?...Should I go to the plant director and risk a reprimand for 'quotation dropping' and 'demogogy'? Or perhaps I should go to the local Komsomol committee where, for all I know, I may be accused of political immaturity in that I do not see the beginning of the bright future."

The Komsomol official also got off some pointed criticism of "socialist competition"--an integral part of the system of "moral

incentives" in which individuals or teams compete for the glory of high production figures. Despite strong official support for these competitions, liberal economists and novelists alike regard them with contempt because they are uneconomic and are often rigged in order to create "heroes."

Academy of Sciences Vice President Rumyantsev returned to print in mid-June with a further plea for the social sciences, this time in an article in Pravda which he coauthored with Pravda political commentator Fedor Burlatsky and with a historian, I. Bestuzhev. Stressing the need to improve "social forecasting," traditionally the special preserve of Marxism-Leninism and the party leadership, they also called for improvement of "political predictions, especially the prospects of developing international relations." In the aftermath of the Arab debacle, these comments seemed especially pointed.

The Momentum and Stridency Increase

On 22 June, poet Andrey Voznesensky--angry over the clumsy last-minute cancellation by Soviet authorities of his scheduled public reading in New York--sent a stinging protest to Pravda. The party paper did not, of course, print it, but the story went the rounds of intellectuals in Moscow and was published in the West last month.

There was a warning sign that the liberals were not going to have it all their way, however. On 25 June, Pravda published an interview with Komsomol head Pavlov, marking Soviet Youth Day and, incidentally, signaling that his position--for the moment at least--was secure. The interview itself was totally conformist, taking the confident tone appropriate to the anniversary and repeating Pavlov's characteristic themes of "labor heroism and revolutionary glory." There was no hint of the problem that had been raised ten days earlier in the Komsomol newspaper concerning youth's recognition of the gulf between Soviet theory and reality.

On 28 June, however, the Moscow press announced that Moscow party chief Nikolay Yegorychev had been replaced by candidate member of the politburo Viktor Grishin. Once again the liberal intellectuals seemed to find an encouraging sign in the replacement of a cultural hardliner by a man less strongly identified with orthodoxy.

Two days later, Komsomolskaya Pravda ran another article by Pravda political commentator Burlatsky, this time writing with L. Karpinsky, a former all-union secretary of the Komsomol. Ostensibly addressed to the narrow issue of censorship in the theater, the article was replete with assurances that it was merely directed against bureaucratic excesses. Its key points had broad inplications, however, for the intellectuals' claim to the right to criticize.

Burlatsky and Karpinsky argued that the true interests of Communism are best served by bold analysis of the difficulties encountered in the Soviet system. They maintained that artists--and by implication all intellectuals--have not only a right but an obligation to take part in this analysis, and that their work should be judged by the Soviet public. They warned that decisions based on a secret and narrowly official approach risk becoming "subjective," a pejorative applied by their successors to the "mistakes" first of Stalin and then of Khrushchev.

On 2 July, the Taganka Theater in Moscow staged the 200th performance of Voznesensky's controversial play, "Antiworlds." The theme of the opening remarks, recited by a member of the cast, was that 200 times "they have tried to stop us," and 200 times "we have performed." "Those who doubt our perseverance," he said, "we invite back for the 2,000th performance." In a curtain speech, Voznesensky himself read several unpublished poems, one of which included a vignette of Khrushchev banging his shoe on the table at the UN. The poem that elicited the most excited audience response dealt with the deadly effect of censorship on creative talents and on creative contributions to society. The audience responded throughout the evening with thunderous applause.

The Conservative Reply

The leadership--intent on keeping the lid on intellectual ferment during the anniversary year and possibly fearing further liberal outbursts when the imminent downgrading of Shelepin was announced--apparently decided to take preventive measures. An unsigned editorial in Komsomolskaya Pravda on 8 July revealed that the Komsomol central committee had condemned publication of the Burlatsky-Karpinsky article. The editorial strongly reaffirmed the need for stronger party control over intellectual expression. As a clinching argument, it cited Brezhnev's speech at the 23rd Party Congress last year, invoking the highest authority to combat what it presented as a serious political deviation.

Western newsmen in Moscow were told that Burlatsky and the chief editor of Komsomolskaya Pravda had been fired. There were reports of pressures on those writers who had signed petitions in support of Solzhenitsyn's protest, and of measures against historians who refused to accept the current line of de-emphasizing Stalin's "mistakes." One of these historians, A. M. Nekrich, was reportedly expelled from the party for his book on the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II which had been published in 1965. The editor at the Academy of Sciences who was responsible for the book's publication was also said to have been fired.

The effectiveness of the conservative clampdown was demonstrated by the silence that followed the announcement on 11 July

of Shelepin's appointment to head the trade unions organization. Subsequently, a central committee decree was published in late August on development of the social sciences. This decree laid heavy stress on the all-pervading importance of Marxism-Leninism and warned against the dangers of "revisionism," but significantly made no counter-balancing reference to "dogmatism." The message was clear for those who would raise "contentious issues"--at least during the build-up for the Great Fiftieth Anniversary.

The Aims of the Liberals

Short-lived as it was, the public argument served to draw attention to that part of the Soviet "take-over" generation occupying the opposite end of the political spectrum from the hard-line "Komsomol groups." The liberal wing is not publicly identified with any individual or group in the leadership, nor do its members necessarily share common career patterns. What they do share is a desire to liberalize--though not to subvert--the Soviet regime. They consider themselves loyal to the party and insist that they have the interests of Communism at heart in pushing for reforms to make the system work better.

In private, they have specified that they want to retain socialism as an economic system, but to see it evolve in the direction of the political democracy of the West. They seek greater influence by the population on the political leadership and broader participation by specialists in the formulation of policies. They have a deep concern for reality--for policies based on facts rather than shibboleths.

In the liberal view, the struggle to be waged is not an institutional one between the party and the intellectuals. Rather, within each institution the liberals have sought to strengthen their position and extend the limits of permissible conduct. The schizophrenic performance of the Komsomol in June and July demonstrates this technique and the reaction it brings.

Since they are scattered through various institutions and do not appear to function as a clique, the liberals are not easily identifiable. Those who have been identified have proved to have durable careers, however, suggesting at a minimum some high-level recognition of the need for their services.

One of their most visible, though not necessarily most influential, representatives is Fedor Burlatsky. Now 40, Burlatsky has been writing for such authoritative publications as Kommunist and Pravda since 1954 on an extraordinary range of subjects--Soviet constitutional theory, reform of criminal trial procedures, economic reform, international relations, and China to name a few. More often

than not, his articles have had a strongly reformist slant.

Burlatsky's liberal tendencies, however, have not prevented him from developing useful ties in the party establishment. In 1964 he was identified as an official in the central committee apparatus. He has coauthored articles with both A. S. Belyakov and Ye. I. Kuskov, who are deputies to party secretary Boris Ponomarev. Another of his frequent coauthors is A. M. Rumyantsev, whose career as an influential middle-level party official goes back at least 20 years.

Thus the liberal intellectuals have some representation in the governing establishment, but they are fully aware that the struggle will be long and often frustrating. Nevertheless, they seem intent on continuing the battle to the extent that the fluctuating political climate allows. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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